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Mr Nigel Appleton  
Dean of the School of Teacher Development  
Bishop Grosseteste University  
Newport  
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Dear Mr Appleton,

### **Evaluation of the quality and effectiveness of phonics training in the Bishop Grosseteste University primary ITE partnership**

Thank you for the help which you and your colleagues, trainees, former trainees, schools and settings gave when I, Robert Lovett, Her Majesty's Inspector, Terry Russell and Emma Brown, Additional Inspectors, conducted an unannounced monitoring inspection of your primary ITE partnership on 5 June 2014. The focus of the inspection was to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of phonics training.

Having considered all of the evidence I am of the opinion that, at this time, the quality and effectiveness of phonics training require improvement.

### **Context**

The Bishop Grosseteste primary ITE partnership provides four programmes of early years and primary training in partnership with approximately 500 schools and settings. At the time of the inspection two hundred and seventy three undergraduate trainees were following a full-time programme, over three years, leading to a Bachelor of Arts degree with qualified teacher status (BA with QTS). Two hundred and ninety seven trainees were following a one year full time postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE) programme. Twenty seven trainees were following a one year 'School Direct' programme which is based in schools. A further thirty nine trainees were following a part time postgraduate certificate in education programme. In addition, thirty trainees were following a fifteen month 'top up' Bachelor of Arts programme with qualified teacher status.



Inspectors visited four partnership schools. Inspectors observed parts of lessons taught by seven trainees and three newly qualified teachers (NQTs). Inspectors also held discussions with seven trainees from the PGCE course and took account of 60 responses to the online trainee questionnaire. Meetings were held with senior leaders and mentors in the four partnership schools visited. Discussions were also held at Bishop Grosseteste University with senior leaders in ITE and those responsible for delivering the training in phonics and early reading. Inspectors reviewed a range of documents including training materials and handbooks. No centre-based training took place during the monitoring inspection, but one inspector considered a range of lecture notes, slide presentations and task-based assignments relating to the teaching of phonics.

## **Outcomes for trainees**

Although inspectors did find evidence of some trainees' who were able to teach phonics effectively, they also found evidence of trainees whose skills were less secure. Consequently, the overall picture of trainees' ability to teaching phonics requires improvement. Inspectors found evidence of gaps in some trainees' subject knowledge which led to inaccuracies in their teaching. For example, in a lesson on silent letters, the trainee had prepared carefully by finding examples of silent letters. However, gaps in the trainee's knowledge of how to teach this aspect of phonics, and the potential errors and misunderstandings pupils may encounter, meant pupils' misconceptions were not picked up by the trainee.

The initial audit of trainees' subject knowledge in phonics is not thorough enough. It is not always used to identify and address potential gaps. The checking of trainees' subject knowledge during their placements with partner schools is more successful in identifying and addressing these gaps in knowledge. The tracking of this information, and provision of additional support at Bishop Grosseteste University, helps undergraduate trainees feel more confident as they progress through their training. However, in the evidence seen by inspectors, nearly two thirds of the cohort sampled required some form of additional support or intervention in developing their expertise in teaching phonics at the end of the first term of their one year training programme. This is supported by the views expressed by trainees in the online questionnaire. Twenty seven percent, of those who responded, expressed dissatisfaction with their training in phonics. While it is clear that the partnership is working well to address the issues in developing the trainees' knowledge of teaching phonics, there has been too little scrutiny and evaluation as to why initial training does not address these issues from the outset.

## **The quality of training across the partnership**

There are positive aspects of phonics training across the partnership. Trainees are supported well to develop their understanding of how to use phonics to teach pupils



how to read and spell. In particular, trainees who spoke to inspectors, highlighted the role of mentors who observe trainees' teaching of phonic lessons and give helpful verbal feedback to enable trainees to improve their practice. However, the written targets which accompany this verbal feedback tend to be too generic and lack specific detail about the precise next steps trainees should take to improve their teaching of phonics.

Trainees were also positive about the helpful materials they received which explain the necessary phonetic knowledge they require. However, they were less positive about the face-to-face training they receive about how to teach phonics. Evidence from the trainees' evaluations of training confirms this. Trainees felt training could be improved by being more clearly presented, focusing more on the 'how' of teaching phonics and helping trainees to gain a more secure grounding of the progression of pupils' understanding within, and between, the different phases of phonics. There is variability in the support given to trainees. Some trainees spoke very highly of the phonics training they received from one of the partnership school clusters. Inspectors found some inconsistencies in the checks made on the quality and consistency of phonics lectures and of the partnership's quality in delivering high quality phonics training.

### **The quality of leadership and management of the ITE partnership**

Leaders and managers are keen to involve trainees in shaping their training to meet trainees' needs. There are committees and structures which involve trainees and enable them to raise concerns about the quality of their training. Bishop Grosseteste University are keen to act on any concerns that are raised by trainees. As at the last inspection, tutors have organised a phonics conference this year to address trainees' concerns about teaching phonics. However, the deeper questions as to why trainees have concerns and whether the initial training in phonics is good enough have not been evaluated rigorously enough. Although there are clear roles and responsibilities for leaders, systems to ensure the consistency and quality of training are not robust. For example, checks to ensure lectures are of consistently high quality are not routinely carried out. Bishop Grosseteste University conducts an annual monitoring review to identify strengths and areas for development in the training. A phonics strand was added to the review following issues raised about phonics training. In response, the team of leaders responsible for English have planned a review of training in English this year.

Inspectors evaluated the improvement plans for the post graduate and undergraduate courses. They found too much variation between these plans with some plans not including measureable criteria and milestones. Evaluation within these plans is not incisive enough and there is too little focus on improving outcomes for trainees.



I hope that you have found the inspection helpful in promoting improvement in your ITE partnership. This letter will be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

**Adrian Guy**  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**

